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Information from two recent surveys describes rural education in the mid-1950's and identifies some of the problems of elementary education in these areas. Findings include a disproportionate number of beginning teachers, small staffs, lower salaries, lower annual expenditures per pupil, greater dependence on State or Federal funds, and lower family incomes.

The one-teacher schools are declining. Those teachers still in one-room schools are mainly older, married, and female. These teachers are not as well educated or well paid as most other teachers and frequently do not meet minimum requirements. The facilities of the one-teacher schools include such inadequacies as poor construction, lack of adequate sanitation and safety devices, and lack of equipment related to curriculum and instruction. Certain basic objectives and standards used to examine the organization and curriculum of elementary schools are presented.

Such major problems facing rural education as recruiting and educating a sufficient number of teachers, providing adequate instructional materials, providing auxiliary and healthful school plants and related physical facilities are identified. Three ways of resolving these problems are consolidation, development of the intermediate unit, and improved local programs.

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RURAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
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RURAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Information from two recent surveys is used to describe rural elementary education as it existed in the mid-1950's. One survey was conducted by the Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare; the other by the Research Division of the National Education Association. The major findings of both surveys identify some of the fundamental problems of elementary education in rural areas, including a disproportionate number of beginning teachers, small staffs, lower salaries, lower annual expenditures per pupil, greater dependence on State or Federal funds, and lower family incomes.

Progress, however, is being made in rural elementary education. One-teacher schools are declining, although in 1959 there still were nearly 24,000 one-teacher schools, attended by 400,000 pupils. Teachers in one-room schools are more likely to be females now than before World War II, are older, females are more likely to be married (half to farmers); these teachers are less well-educated and less well-paid than teachers in other schools; more frequently they do not meet minimum requirements, and, like rural education in general, one-teacher schools include a disproportionate number of beginning teachers. Facilities in the one-teacher schools present an appalling picture including poor construction, lack of adequate sanitation facilities and safety devices as well as lack of adequate facilities and equipment related to curriculum and instruction.

Much needs to be done to bring elementary education in many rural schools up to standards of good education in the 1960's. Eleven basic objectives and standards are set forth for examining the organization and curriculum of elementary schools. Five major problems facing rural education are identified and three ways of resolving these problems are discussed. The problems are (1) recruiting and educating a sufficient number of teachers; (2) providing adequate instructional materials; (3) providing auxiliary services; (4) providing education for children with special needs; and (5) developing modern and healthful school plants and related physical facilities. The three general approaches to resolving these problems are consolidation, development of the intermediate unit, and improved local programs. The pros and cons of each approach are examined.

The concept of "the little red school house" is so surrounded with nostalgia, romance, and fiction that it seems wise to approach the question of rural education at the elementary school level by looking at two surveys which show rural education in the United States as it existed in the mid 1950's. These studies represent the most exact and recent research available in the field and can serve as a starting point in considering the basic, common education available to thousands of children in the United States of America.

WHAT IS THE EDUCATION PICTURE IN THE 101 MOST RURAL COUNTIES OF THE UNITED STATES?

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare conducted a rural school study using data for the 1955-1956 school term. (1) The statistics obtained in that survey show the picture of our most rural education. Two criteria were used in choosing the counties:

1. There was no center of 2,500 or more people in the county; thus, all counties met the census definition for being rural.

2. Fifty-nine percent or more of the total population lived on farms.

The counties were located in 24 of the states.

For purpose of comparison the most rural counties are contrasted with the other counties in the same state. Among the significant findings were these:

1. There was a disproportionate number of beginning teachers in the most rural counties.

2. The average size of a school staff was 3.4 per school compared to 7.4 in less rural counties.

3. Teachers' salaries were lower on the average, in rural counties ($2,933) as compared with less rural counties ($3,719).

4. The current annual expenditure per pupil was $211 in the most rural counties compared with $250 for other counties in the same states, and further compared with the national average of just under $300 per pupil.

5. The average instructional cost per pupil (books, materials, teachers salaries) was $145 in the most rural counties as compared with $170 in the other counties.

6. Approximately 12.3 percent of the annual school budgets of the most rural counties was allotted to transportation costs.

7. In the most rural counties two-thirds of the cost of the schools was furnished by State and Federal funds and one-third from local taxation.

In the less rural counties the local taxes paid half of the cost.

8. In the most rural counties 67.4 percent of the families had incomes under $2,000 per year in contrast to less rural counties where only 36.9 percent of the families had incomes below $2,000.

9. Pupil attendance in the rural schools compared favorably with attendance figures for the state.

10. In the most rural counties there were comparatively few supervisory officers or auxiliary personnel. Where they existed the salary differential between teachers and supervisory personnel was not great.

In this statistical study no attempt was made to assess the quality of the educational offerings. However, if the school districts in the less rural counties of the 24 states are "buying" a dollars worth of education for each dollar expended we can infer that the most rural counties are buying less education, and we are far from our goal of equality of educational opportunity for each child no matter where he lives.

WHAT IS THE PRESENT STATUS OF ONE-TEACHER SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES?

In 1960 the Research Division of the National Education Association conducted a survey of one-teacher schools in the United States.(2) From that extensive report the following findings have significance for our study in this conference:

1. The one-teacher school is declining. In 1917-1918 it represented 70.8 percent of all schools, in 1958-1959 only 18.2 percent of the schools are one-teacher schools. In 1917-1918 31 percent of all the teachers and 25 percent of all school children were in one-teacher schools, whereas in 1958-1959 the percentages for teachers had dropped to 1.8, and to students, to 1.1.

2. However, in 1958-1959, there were still 23,695 one-teacher schools in the United States, attended by 400,000 pupils and, while they are not a large percentage of all American pupils, they are 400,000 important individuals.

3. The greatest concentration of one-teacher schools is in Northwestern United States; the fewest are in New England. In 1958-1959 Connecticut reported no one-teacher schools while Nebraska, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and North Dakota each reported more than 2,000 one-teacher schools.

4. The picture of the teacher in one-room schools has changed greatly.

   a. The percentage of male teachers declined from 14.6 percent in 1937

to only 8 percent in 1958-1959.

b. The average age of the teacher in 1937 was 25, whereas in 1958-1959 the average age was 45.

c. The average female teacher in 1937 was single. The average female teacher today is married and has two children. Approximately one half of these teachers are married to farmers.

d. The one-teacher school is taught in 64.3 percent of the situations by a teacher who lives outside of the district where she teaches. In 1951-1952 only 48.6 percent of the teachers lived outside the district in which they taught.

e. In years of preparation for teaching the teachers in the one-teacher schools lag behind other teachers.

	One-teacher schools	Others
Less than 4 years of college	83.2%	33%
Four years of college	13.6%	43.6%
More than 4 years of college	3.2%	23.4%

f. In meeting state certification requirements a similar lag is noted; 14.3 percent of teachers in one-teacher schools do not meet minimum requirements. For the general population of elementary teachers the percentage is 12.3 percent.

g. The average teacher in one-teacher schools has had 11 years of service, but only 3 years in the school where she is currently employed.

h. There is a disproportionate number of beginning teachers in one-teacher schools.

i. While teacher salaries have increased approximately 129 percent since 1924-1925, there still is a great differential between the salaries of teachers in one-room schools and the average salaries of all classroom teachers.

One-Teacher Schools	All Classroom Teachers
51.1% - $2,000 to $2,999	51.3% - $4,500 and over
24.8% - $3,000 to $3,499	31.7% - $3,500 to 4,499
5.5% - below $2,000	17% - below $3,500

5. The one-teacher schools have small enrollments: 68 percent have fewer than 20 pupils. The average enrollment is 17 in contrast to the average enrollment of 30 in other elementary school classrooms in the nation.

6. The school facilities studied present an appalling picture:

15 percent were judged to be very bad.
67 percent had no running water.
67 percent had no indoor toilets.
73 percent had no lunch services.
3 percent had no electricity but 19 percent reported insufficient electrical fixtures.
84 percent were of frame construction.
33 percent had no fire extinguishers.
60 percent of the teachers did their own custodial work.

7. In facilities and equipment related to curriculum and instruction the picture is no brighter.

88 percent of the schools had no movie projector.
43.7 percent had no library facilities.
75.5 percent had no science corners or equipment.
25 percent had no encyclopedias or outdated ones.
30 percent had no large wall maps.
36 percent had no globe.
70 percent had no film strip or slide projectors.
97 percent had no television receivers.

8. Some help was available from central agencies -

57 percent had regular health examinations.
52 percent could get instructional materials (principally audio visual) from a materials center.

66 percent had services for helping with physically handicapped children.

Less than 20 percent of the schools had assistance with art, music, and mentally handicapped children.

Less than 10 percent had help in speech therapy, remedial reading, or guidance.

This then is the one-teacher school in the United States - small school plants, small enrollments, minimal preparation of teachers, minimal physical facilities, minimal instructional materials, and minimal public and professional interest as expressed in professional writing. From 1955-1957 the Education Index listed only six articles on one-teacher schools appearing in professional magazines.

These are the facts which show the nature of our most rural education. From the one-teacher schools and the 100 percent rural counties to the schools

in suburbia where rural eudcation and city education blend together, rural education means many things: large consolidated schools, schools in small towns and villages, rural schools in which none of the pupils are farm children, and schools attended by the children of city families who have moved to the country because "it is a better place to rear children." In each of these schools pupils must receive the best education it is possible to provide, through the state and local units of government responsible for education.

WHAT IS GOOD ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN THE 1960'S?

The elementary schools have not been scrutinized and evaluated by national studies comparable to those made by James Conant of the secondary schools. However, groups working in the field of education are agreed on certain basic objectives and standards which may be used in examining the organization and curriculum of elementary schools: (3), (4).

1. The elementary school is responsible for considering not only what facts the pupils learn, but how they develop attitudes and habits of work; how they develop skills of critical thinking; and how they develop appreciations and understandings.

2. The elementary school is responsible for developing competency in skills of reading, mathematics, and communication. (This is not the traditional 3R's - it includes them but also much more).

3. The elementary school is responsible for developing self-directed pupils who work well with others, but who also are competent in independent work.

4. The elementary school has a planned curriculum for science and the social studies. The scientific method of solving problems is taught as a way of working in other fields, as well as in science. Understanding of the way people live and work in all parts of the world, and appreciation for those people are important emphases as well.

5. The elementary school affords opportunities for growth in aesthetic appreciation and for creative expression in a variety of fields.

6. The elementary school is concerned with the physical and mental well being of pupils. Health teaching, physical education, guidance and counselling, healthful school environment, school lunch, and health services unit to provide the necessary environment which will enable pupils to develop physical and mental health.

7. The elementary school should be so organized that each pupil, regardless of his mental ability, is challenged to learn to the extent of his ability.

8. The teacher in the elementary classroom should be adequately prepared

for his task. Four years of preparation beyond high school should be the minimum.

9. There should be a variety of auxiliary services and personnel available for use by the teachers in the elementary school.

10. The elementary school in its total organization and curriculum should exemplify the democratic way of life: consideration for individuals, opportunity for success, responsibility for one's own actions, and shared responsibility for the total good.

11. Pupils in the elementary school should build foundations of interest, study skills, and such mastery of basic subject matter that will enable them to make a successful transition to secondary education.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS THAT MUST BE SOLVED IF RURAL SCHOOLS ARE TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE 1960'S?

The question of teachers and the preparation of teachers is a major problem. The average age of teachers in rural areas is high. New teachers are needed. How can rural areas insure a supply of well prepared, competent teachers?

A second major question involves instructional materials. Learning in the elementary school involves more than a text book. What are the best ways in rural school to develop a wealth of learning materials which in turn will provide a rich learning environment?

A third major question is the provision of help and auxiliary services for teachers in rural areas. The elementary curriculum today demands the help of experts in certain fields. How can this help be provided?

A fourth major question involves finding ways to provide education for those pupils who have special educational needs - the gifted, mentally retarded, talented, physically handicapped, and the emotionally distrubed?

The fifth major problem involves school plant and physical facilities. Is it possible to have up-to-date, healthful school facilities in all rural communities?

There are a great number of other questions which might be asked but, if we can find solutions to these five questions, most of the other pressing questions also will be answered.

WHAT WAYS OF SOLVING THESE PROBLEMS MUST BE CONSIDERED?

Each community and each state have problems peculiar to their own areas and in the final analysis these local problems will determine which solutions

are used. In general three ways have been explored and should be explored further:

1. Consolidation - can most of the problems be met by combining small into larger schools?

   Pro: building facilities can be improved, instructional materials can be shared, teachers can receive supervisory help, auxiliary services can be provided, teachers will not be isolated from one another, and more adequate provisions can be made for pupils with special needs -

   Con: will already great transportation costs be multiplied? Will pupils have to travel even greater distances? Will local concern for schools be lost? Will communities with no common background or concerns be forced into one school? Will the big school lose the personal touch?

2. The Intermediate Unit - by reducing the number of administrative units and small districts, can we provide for better educational facilities?

   Pro: auxiliary services and personnel can be provided at minimum cost and maximum efficiency. The potential for overall curriculum planning is increased. Local control is not lost, but educational opportunity is equalized.

   Con: will local districts be forced into programs they cannot afford? Will this not be a big step away from local determination of school policies? Will it really be more economical?

3. The Improved Program at the local level.

   Pro: a small school district can have a program that is effective. Enlarging the school or district will not insure improvement of curriculum. We need to preserve the small districts and local control because it is "The American Way".

   Con: it is too expensive of personnel and money to have an adequate program in a small school district. Our ideas of "community" have changed in this era of rapid transportation and easy communication.

Each of these solutions to the problems of elementary education in rural America must be examined thoughtfully so that the solutions reached are enlightened solutions which will provide the best possible schools for all the children of all the people.

This paper began with a reference to "the little red schoolhouse", an institution revered and loved in America. We need to remember that in its

day it represented the best education possible for its time and location. It served America well.

This is a new day, and a new school is demanded to serve it well. If we, by careful planning, can establish schools which will serve the United States as well in the second half of the 1900's as "the little red schoolhouse" did in the second half of the 1800's, we will not need fear the 2000's.

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